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Chair

The Honourable Robert Nault

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1530)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Robert Nault (Kenora, Lib.)): I'd like to bring this meeting to order.

As you know, we are in the process of doing a major study of countries of focus and women, peace, and security. In that discussion, we've looked at two case studies that we would like to do, one in Colombia and one in Guatemala. Before we wander off to those two destinations, I wanted to take this opportunity to get the officials in front of us so we could have a discussion and in particular, get a briefing about what's going on in those two particular countries on the ground.

In front of us today is Isabelle Bérard, director general, Latin America.

I welcome you to the committee again, with your colleagues. I'll let you introduce them. I understand that you'll be making the presentation. I'll turn it over to you, Ms. Bérard. After that, I'm sure there will be questions by the members. The floor is yours.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard (Director General, Latin America (Development), Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for giving us the opportunity to appear before you today.

It is a pleasure to address the committee on behalf of Global Affairs Canada. I am joined by Sylvia Cesaratto, Director-South America and Mylène Paradis, Deputy Director-Central America. Sylvia looks after Colombia and Mylène looks after Guatemala.

My objective today is to provide you with an overview of the situation and of our development co-operation in Guatemala and Colombia, two countries that you will visit in August and in September, and where Canada has been providing assistance for about 40 years.

I will start with Guatemala, a country that went through a peace process about 20 years ago to end a 36-year armed conflict, and then talk about Colombia, which appears set to conclude, hopefully, its own peace process to end the last armed conflict in the Americas.

Guatemala is Central America's largest country in terms of population and economy, and an important partner for Canada in the promotion of security and stability in the region. The trauma of Guatemala's internal armed conflict has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on all spheres of Guatemalan society, which must deal with a legacy of a deeply entrenched culture of violence, impunity and discrimination. Despite being the largest economy in Central America, nearly 60% of its population lives in poverty, almost a quarter of its population lives in extreme poverty, and great social and economic inequalities persist.

Guatemala also has the largest indigenous population in Central America, representing more than 40% of the country's total population, and some of the most vulnerable communities in the country.

Guatemala has made initial progress in the fight against corruption and impunity. However, as we approach the 20th anniversary of the peace accords, it is clear that space remains for improvement in many areas, particularly in addressing social and economic inequalities, which were among the root causes of the conflict.

Guatemala remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world for women. Guatemala ranks third in the killing of women worldwide, with a femicide rate of 9.7 per 100,000 people. Our embassy reports that from 2012 to date, almost 3,000 women have been murdered, while only 381 cases resulted in a judicial decision.

During the conflict, atrocities were committed against women, including torture, slavery, forced disappearance and the use of rape as a weapon of war. Processes of transitional justice have however barely started. The first criminal trial, pertaining specifically to sexual violence, has only recently been heard in court and resulted in a landmark conviction. This case helped raise awareness about the systematic violation of indigenous women's rights and the verdict was an important step toward reducing impunity for sexual and gender-based violence. It also brought attention to the ongoing efforts of activists fighting for justice.

Some of the most palpable problems that Guatemalan women and girls face are a lack of education opportunities, poor access to health, economic exclusion, inaccessibility of political positions, inequality of wages, limited access to family planning and violence. The plights affecting the region, such as insecurity, impunity, food insecurity, and natural disasters, also have a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable populations, including women in particular. Guatemalan women face extremely high rates of mortality related to pregnancy, violence, and other preventable causes of death.

[*English*]

Global Affairs Canada's programming in Guatemala seeks to address these challenges. It focuses on strengthening democracy, governance, and security, while protecting and supporting the most vulnerable: women and girls, and indigenous and rural populations. This support is provided through various programs. Guatemala received just over $9 million in financing in 2014-15.

I am very pleased that you will have the opportunity to visit several projects and witness the contributions we made in addressing the many challenges Guatemalans, and especially Guatemalan women, face today. You will hear of course about the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala, CICIG, a United Nations-backed, independent investigatory commission supported by Canada and other donors. Global Affairs Canada's support to CICIG has contributed to strengthening the rule of law and increasing the government's capacity to investigate and prosecute crimes as well as to improvements in the country's legislative framework.

You will visit the town of Rabinal, the location of many grave human rights abuses during the armed conflict. You will meet with women who continue to fight for justice for the crimes they and their families suffered as well as the organization that supports them, Lawyers Without Borders. The local legal clinic has received capacity building for strategic litigation, allowing it to provide effective representation for the plaintiffs and psychological and support services to survivors.

You will also learn more about the work of the Canadian Tula Foundation working to help the ministry of health and others to improve health services for rural populations using an innovative concept. The work started in 2004 with a project supported by the Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA, and the Centre for Nursing Studies in Newfoundland. Guatemalan officials have been so satisfied with the results that they have asked Tula Foundation to scale up its work to several other departments of the country. In response, Global Affairs Canada recently awarded $7.6 million to that foundation to do so.

You will witness the results of a long-standing agricultural co-operative initiative providing economic alternatives and allowing Q'eqchi' indigenous populations to benefit from sustainable agricultural practices offering quality products to internal and external markets. The initiative has also expanded to include community tourism where many young women are being employed. The co-operative, which includes the leadership of women in decision-making positions, is now a multi-million dollar business.

You will also meet with girls who have received scholarships, which have enabled them to continue their studies. In impoverished communities, girls are the first to leave school, most often around the age of 12, when schooling is no longer free. The longer they remain in school, the better their future prospects are for health and employment, and for having their rights respected.

In Guatemala City, you will meet with members of congress and other government representatives to hear of the government's approach to issues broadly relevant to women, peace, and security, including the preparation of legislative initiatives and amendments.

Finally, you will visit Memory House in Guatemala City, which memorializes the history of the armed conflict. It will provide important insights into the causes and effects of the conflict and the efforts of Guatemalan organizations to ensure these events are never forgotten or repeated. You will meet with women leaders from civil society to hear of their achievements in fighting for an equal and just society as well as the many challenges that remain.

● (1535)

[*Translation*]

I will now continue with some observations on Canada's role in supporting women, peace and security in Colombia.

Colombia is an ambitious, middle-income country with a population of over 44 million and is currently the fastest-growing economy in South America.

It is a key partner for Canada in the Americas as it shares our values of democracy, human rights, environmental sustainability, economic integration, and international security. It also seeks to play a greater role in the region and on the world stage. Colombia's stability and trajectory matter, particularly as we witness the deterioration of neighbouring Venezuela. Colombians represent our largest Latino diaspora community in Canada.

Our commercial relationship with Colombia is also very important. We were the first G7 country to sign a free trade agreement with Colombia, in effect since 2011. Our embassy estimates that we now have over $10 billion in cumulative Canadian investment in Colombia.

At the same time, Colombia is home to the last war in the Americas: a complex internal armed conflict between the government, guerrilla movements, and a host of armed criminal groups, which has lasted over 50 years. It has claimed over 220,000 lives, 80% of them civilians. It has forced more than 6 million people from their homes, such that Colombia long held the record for the highest number of internally displaced people in the world; it is now second after Syria. Colombia also has the second highest number of landmine victims in the world after Afghanistan.

[*English*]

Colombia's income distribution is one of the most unequal in the world, comparable to Zimbabwe. The relationship between inequality and the armed conflict is clear: tensions emerged to challenge the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of the elites.

The good news is that Colombia is changing. Its government is currently concluding peace negotiations with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, FARC, the largest guerrilla group. Initial agreements have been reached on four of the key items: rural development, political participation, drug trafficking and illegal crops, and transitional justice. We expect agreements on the remaining two, a ceasefire and disarmament, to come shortly. Official negotiations with the second guerrilla movement, the National Liberation Army, are also expected to begin soon.

A UN Security Council political mission for Colombia was approved earlier this year. The mission is planned to be comprised of unarmed observers from Latin American countries responsible for monitoring and verifying a bilateral ceasefire with the FARC and the laying down of arms. Our Prime Minister met recently with Colombian President Santos and expressed Canada's commitment to peace building in Colombia.

The conflict has subjected the civilian population to widespread human rights abuses, ranging from targeted assassinations, forced disappearances, forced displacement, rape, and recruitment of child soldiers. Women and children have been the victims of violence, exploitation, and abuse by armed actors. Teenage pregnancy is extremely high. One in five Colombian women age 15 to 19 are or have been pregnant and 64% of the pregnancies are unplanned.

Global Affairs Canada's support to Colombia totalled close to $40 million in 2014-15, with a focus on human rights, child protection, education, conflict victims, inclusive economic growth, rural economic development, and peace and security, such as, for example, justice, land mine action, and sexual and gender-based violence. This support also includes international humanitarian assistance contributions delivered by organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Canada's response has been an integrated one precisely because these issues are interrelated. Lack of development in rural areas is both the cause and the result of weak rule of law and limited government presence. While Colombia certainly has stronger state capacity than many other conflict-affected countries, international presence, expertise, and resources are required to help bring a meaningful state presence to lawless regions that have been the epicentres of conflict for decades.

One area where Canada continues to make a meaningful difference is our leadership in supporting child protection and education. Our programming, executed by organizations like Plan International and Save the Children, and situated in the most conflict-affected departments of the country, helps the most vulnerable children and youth develop life options and resist recruitment by illegal groups.

Our projects emphasize gender equality, empowering young women to become community leaders and agents of change. Our inclusive growth programming, executed by organizations such as the Canadian Co-operative Association, Socodevi, and Développement international Desjardins, helps develop co-operative rural businesses, empowering women as participants and leaders. Our peace and security programming and our support to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has helped provide justice for women victims of sexual violence and armed conflict.

I also want to highlight the advocacy work of our embassy in Bogota, which leads donor coordination groups on human rights and on gender equality. Together with UN Women, our ambassador and director of co-operation are leading the dialogue between the international community and the government on the inclusion of gender in peace negotiations. Our reference point for this work is of course UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. The gender equality group has already succeeded in convincing the government to create a national gender subcommission to provide input to the peace negotiations.

During your visit to Colombia, you will meet with key interlocutors, including Colombian ministers, the presidential adviser on gender equality, and UN Women to learn about women and gender issues in the peace process.

● (1540)

We are planning for you to travel to Meta department, where you will meet with local authorities, conflict victims, demobilized former combatants, land mine victims, and women's groups. You will have a chance to hear first-hand how women have been impacted by the conflict and how they seek to build a new era of peace.

Let me conclude with three key messages from our Guatemala and Colombia experience, which will hopefully inform your study. First, in Guatemala and Colombia, inequality has generated violent armed conflict, and vice versa. Second, women continue to disproportionately suffer the effects of this violence across generations. Third, women must lead the planning and implementation of peace on the ground. A truly lasting peace is not possible without the leadership and the full participation of women.

Canada has made a difference for women in Guatemala and Colombia, and there is much more that we can do to help them usher in a new era of peace and prosperity.

Thank you for your attention. I will be happy, of course, to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go straight to questions.

Mr. Kent.

● (1545)

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you all for your attendance, for your advice, and for foreshadowing what should be a very interesting couple of visits.

I'll ask three very short questions.

I'm just wondering, with regard to Guatemala, what the balance of program spending is between programs protecting women and girls and indigenous and rural populations and the actual costs of the security to safely deliver those programs.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I would have to get back to you with more specific data on this. I do not have this handy, I must admit.

Hon. Peter Kent: Okay.

It is shocking, the notoriety Guatemala has as a place for femicide, not only among the domestic population but also because husbands across the region, across Central America, with murderous intent, very often take their spouses to Guatemala because they know they will be safe from prosecution after murder.

Canada did fund, when I was engaged in the area with the department, an anti-corruption and anti-violence program. I'm just wondering what the status of that is. At the time, we found that corruption existed at the highest levels of the supreme court, in government, and among bureaucracies.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Actually, if you allow me, I will refer to the maps that have been circulated. There's one for Guatemala, and one for Colombia of course. You will find on this piece of paper all the operational projects that are currently being funded by Global Affairs Canada.

I would like to draw your attention to the fact that these are operational projects. This doesn't, of course, include some of the projects that were completed in the last couple of years, which, for instance, have been implemented by START. I believe Tamara Guttman appeared here. She is the director general responsible for that program.

The program is in the process of being renewed. There were quite a number of initiatives put forward to address a number of the issues you talked about. It's in the process of being renewed.

There are no operational projects, but we're perfectly conscious that projects have been put forward to address the issue. Of course, we'd be happy to provide you with more information.

On the ground, you will be visiting some of those projects that were completed and that achieved, actually, quite a lot.

CICIG, the UN-backed investigation commission, is something we've been supporting for a number of years, since 2004, if I'm right. The commission worked on identifying the crimes and the corruption being spread throughout the country.

The anti-crime capacity program did complement the activities of CICIG. Actually, all the initiatives, be they from development, the anti-crime capacity-building program, or START, work together to address all the issues from various perspectives. In terms of the anti-crime capacity-building program, there are still quite a number of initiatives going on, and they do appear here on this.

Hon. Peter Kent: That'll be fascinating to see.

I have one question with regard to Colombia. What is the status of the program that Canada was sponsoring for the restoration of property to the victims of the armed conflict, particularly the women and children of victims murdered during the conflict, whose lands were dispossessed by a variety of people in government and otherwise?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I'm afraid I will have to come back to you on this one.

Hon. Peter Kent: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fragiskatos, go ahead, please.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much for appearing today.

Colombia has been on the countries-of-focus list since 2009.

Madam Bérard, when you addressed the committee some weeks ago, you left us with a sense of how the countries-of-focus policy works, the criteria involved. One thing we've seen since in the testimonials that have been provided by witnesses, particularly from NGOs, is that there is a lack of clarity insofar as how countries are added to the list and how countries are taken off of it. Is there consultation?

In the case of Colombia, for example, how was Colombia added to the list? Can you also speak about other states? When they're added to the list or taken off of it, to what extent have consultations been carried out?

● (1550)

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: If I remember correctly, because we did appear a couple of weeks ago, my colleague Deirdre Kent did mention the criteria that were used in 2009 to actually select the countries. The criteria linked to Canadian interests at the time had been put forward, and in that context Colombia did meet those criteria. Was there consultation? At the time, I was working on a geographic program, so from a policy perspective, I guess you should be asking some people who were involved in the process itself to get a better sense of whether or not there were consultations or what type of consultations were led then.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: You're saying the decision was more in line with Canadian strategic interests or policy priorities—

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: When I appeared, I did mention that the 10 countries we were in 20 years ago were exactly the same ones as those in 2014-15. Of course, the balance was slightly different in terms of the amount of money that was granted to those countries. We have been in Colombia for quite a number of years.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay.

Since you mentioned criteria, I would be remiss not to follow up on that point. When you testified, you told us about needs, capacity to benefit from development assistance, and alignment with Canadian policy priorities. That is how the country-of-focus criteria are rolled out. That's basically been the policy. Each of these factors is taken into account on an equal basis. Since that time, as I say, we've spoken to many witnesses who have a very difficult time understanding how each of these factors could be weighed equally.

Could you tell the committee, now that we have you back, whether or not it's possible to weigh each of these criteria equally? For me, it seems impossible, but perhaps I'm missing something.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: As I mentioned earlier, I wasn't within the team that was working on the policy work that was being led to identify the countries. Lots of analysis was done to make sure that proper weighting was given to each of the criteria. I'm afraid I will have to leave it at that, because this is the extent of the knowledge I have about the process at the time.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Okay. I'm just saying that it's all a bit mysterious, because if you have these three criteria, which one wins out, or are they all, on a one-third basis, I suppose, weighed equally? It's just very unclear. It's been unclear to the witnesses who have testified, so I just wanted to follow up on that.

This is my final question. To what extent has the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala reached out to local women's advocacy organizations as a way of including them and allowing them to have a voice in policy direction? It's very interesting considering that we looked at women, peace, and security as our first study. I'd be very intrigued by what you could tell us on that front.

Anyone could answer, for that matter.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I will say a couple of words, but Mylène, maybe you can jump in here.

As I said, the commission worked at identifying what was going on in terms of corruption and what needed to be addressed in terms of investigation. Through various supports from our program, we actually tried to make sure that the issues of women were going to be addressed.

The START program I mentioned earlier did have a very specific initiative to support. It was done through Lawyers Without Borders to help groups actually raise the awareness of the violations against women, and they actually succeeded in making sure that women knew their voices were being heard.

There may be other initiatives that you might be aware of, Mylène.

● (1555)

Ms. Mylène Paradis (Deputy Director, Central America, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): Yes, thank you.

To address your question, which is very relevant, I believe, I think CICIG, as part of its mandate, has to consult with NGOs, and especially NGOs who work with women. I don't know if you are aware of the following fact.

[*Translation*]

When Thelma Aldana, the new attorney general, was appointed to her position in May 2014, one of her major mandates was to combat violence against women. She is working very closely with Commissioner Iván Velásquez Gómez. They are working hard to ensure that organizations committed to women's issues are heard and that their demands are incorporated into the commission's policies.

I do not know if you have noticed, but, recently, the commission has also submitted a report on the trafficking of young women in Guatemala, which is a situation that causes great concern. This is the international commission against impunity in Guatemala, or CICIG, which insisted that a report on the trafficking of young women be published in Guatemala.

A few weeks ago, we went to Guatemala for consultations, accompanying David Morrison, the assistant deputy minister. We met Commissioner Velásquez and Attorney General Aldana. The major problem in Guatemala, actually, is access to the regions. Even the CICIG and the public safety ministry barely cover 10% of Guatemalan territory. So women's issues in the regions are a significant problem. In Guatemala, both nationally and regionally, women's issues are very close to the hearts of the attorney general and Commissioner Velásquez.

I would like to go back to a point I raised earlier. My attention lapsed for a moment, because the CICIG was established in 2007 and Canada provided support in 2008. Since 2008, then, we have given $18 million to the commission, which is doing extraordinary work on the ground, as I am sure you are aware.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Laverdière, the floor is yours.

[*English*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much for that really interesting presentation, ladies. I appreciate it a great deal and I am going to keep my copy so that I can read it again.

I am going to use your presence here as an opportunity to ask you for your assessment of the situation in Venezuela and what is being done about Venezuela at the Organization of American States.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I am going to ask my colleague Ms. Cesaratto to answer that.

Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto (Director, South America, Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development): My colleague gives me the hard questions to answer.

Thank you for the question, Ms. Laverdière.

We are monitoring the situation in Venezuela very closely. We are certainly concerned with what we observe in economic, political and humanitarian terms.

Politically and diplomatically, we would like the two parties involved in the situation, the government and the opposition, to sit down at the same table to have a real discussion and to find a solution in the interests of the citizens of Venezuela.

We have again communicated our approach to senior officials from their ministry of foreign affairs, who were in Canada last week, actually. We also did so a few weeks ago to opposition members of the Venezuelan Parliament, who were also visiting Ottawa.

In addition, our ambassador to the OAS and her successor made the same comments last week at an extraordinary session on Venezuela organized by the chair of the Permanent Council of the Organization of American States, Argentina.

We support the initiatives and the statement issued by the OAS, which calls for dialogue.

We also support the efforts of former presidents of Spain, the Dominican Republic and Panama who have acted as facilitators and mediators in this situation. Our concern, of course, is for the people. If a solution is not found, it is going to make the everyday situation worse for them.

I hope that answers your question.

● (1600)

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: It does answer my question. Thank you very much.

Two things have also occurred to me and I will quickly bring up one of them.

You said that there was a legislative initiative in Guatemala about women, peace and security. If so, would it be possible to send us more details about it?

You are indicating that it is possible. Thank you.

I have another question.

At one point, Lawyers Without Borders Canada was working with Guatemalan organizations on the lawsuit against General Montt. I believe its funding was interrupted. Have we started to fund Lawyers Without Borders Canada again?

Ms. Mylène Paradis: Actually, Lawyers Without Borders Canada received new funding from the stabilization and reconstruction task force, or START, for a project that is definitely about women and that has led to prosecution in the Sepur Zarco case. You will surely recall seeing those two soldiers who were accused of using women as sex slaves during the armed conflict. Lawyers Without Borders Canada has done a lot of work with local lawyers so that those women can testify in court. Their funding ended in March 2016 as START came to an end. Now, with the renewal, we will see if they can regain the funding so that they can continue to do their excellent work in Guatemala.

I know that they receive funding as part of the development program that sends volunteers into the field. So young lawyers from our Canadian universities are taking part in placements in Guatemala and working in legal offices there.

On the subject of Lawyers Without Borders Canada, I would like to mention that, when you are there, people say that they have played a key role in everything going on in Guatemala.

Perhaps it was actually just a matter of being in the right place at the right time, but they arrived when there were few resources to support the victims of the conflict. So they set up an office of specialized litigation lawyers. They identified a person who was working on hundreds of cases alone in her office. They trained this person to develop a network around her. That office is successful. It is precisely because of them that the Rios Montt trial was able to begin.

Unfortunately, it was interrupted, but that is not because of a lack of funding for Lawyers Without Borders Canada. Mr. Montt's lawyers played with the system a little and succeeded in putting his case on ice. We understand that he may be suffering from dementia. So it is difficult to bring him into court. He is very, very old now. He is over 90.

Support from START for Lawyers Without Borders Canada led to cases that in turn led to historic decisions in Guatemala. There was the Sepur Zarco case involving the military, but there was also the Dos Erres case, where soldiers were accused of completely razing a village and killing 181 people. Those soldiers were charged and sentenced to hundreds of years in prison, thanks in part to the work done by our people in the field.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Levitt, go ahead, please.

Mr. Michael Levitt (York Centre, Lib.): I'm wondering if you can give us some perspective on the leveraging of development assistance in trying to achieve better outcomes for human rights. We've been dealing in this committee and also the subcommittee on international human rights with Venezuela and Honduras, and of course Colombia and Guatemala are on the agenda for our intervention.

Given the history of horrible violence particularly in Guatemala, which has one of the highest murder rates in the world, how do we go about bringing human rights and development together? Then, if we have time, I want to ask a follow-up question on Honduras and the murder of Berta Cáceres.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I did mention the last time that I appeared that we do, of course, pay a lot of attention to human rights. Through our development programming and other programs that are being implemented by Global Affairs Canada, we are always very mindful of the human rights perspective. As a matter of fact, it is part of the Official Development Assistance Accountability Act. It's an element that we need to address when we assess and plan for those initiatives being supported through the international assistance envelope.

You do address those issues through various means. You're addressing the root cause of poverty, so you're either providing help to communities to develop economically and providing health and education services so people feel they have opportunities to grow. Of course, we do offer capacity building to government institutions so they can better meet the needs of their population. Through other programs such as START and anti-crime capacity building, we do work with investigation commissions in the justice sector to make sure that whenever there are issues, these can be addressed.

In Colombia, for example, we co-chair a group on human rights. We're co-chairing with UN Women, and this is a group that actually has managed to get two women involved in the peace process, which wasn't the case. No women had been identified to participate in the peace process negotiation, so we feel that this is essential.

For Guatemala, we are supporting CICIG. Maybe Mylène can say something more.

● (1605)

Ms. Mylène Paradis: Yes, there is also a group of donors, and Canada always raises human rights in the context of this group of donors, so it's basically a cross-cutting theme.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: It's a combination of the actions of our people on the ground, our ambassadors and our team on the ground, who are having policy dialogue with the government, and through initiatives such as bilateral programs, partnership programs, anti-crime capacity, START, etc.

Mr. Michael Levitt: One issue that comes up with regard to the issue of human rights, whether for women, or in the case of Berta Cáceres, a human rights defender, and again we're broadening it to the kind of Latin American theatre here, is accountability and our ability to kind of hold these countries accountable. It's in the rules, but are we able to do that, obviously taking into account that we want to continue getting development assistance in there? Are we finding a way to have our voice heard on these issues when they come up, and is it effective? I guess that's the better part of the question.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Certainly, in Colombia we're dealing with a more sophisticated government, so we're having conversations with the government. They do feel accountable towards their populations, so it is probably less of an issue than it would be for countries like Guatemala, where it is more of a challenge. Again, we are working with CICIG to make sure that civil society is involved and that we do allow populations to be educated and have healthy lives, which essentially allows people to exercise their rights.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Mr. Chair, do I have any more time? Am I okay?

The Chair: You have 50 seconds.

Mr. Michael Levitt: Sorry.

Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto: I was going to add that, in addition to that type of support is the strengthening of institutions and capacity building that we do on the justice side and on the policing side as well.

To answer your question with respect Berta Cáceres, for example, programs are being put into place in Central America, where we're working to increase the capacity of the police in terms of their investigative techniques. We are working with the public defender and the attorney general, say, to prosecute these crimes. We are defending human rights defenders' rights but also strengthening the justice and policing sector at the same time.

To speak to Isabelle's point, it's an integrated approach.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Levitt.

Mr. Miller, go ahead, please.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc Miller (Ville-Marie—Le Sud-Ouest—Île-des-Soeurs, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My thanks to the witnesses for their presentations.

I would like to quickly touch on the role that women play in the process of development aid. We have just finished a report on peace and security. We talk about the important role that women play and should play from now on in the process of peace and security.

I would like to focus—as you mentioned, Ms. Paradis—on the specific process of development aid. I find it strange that we do not give more money to Guatemala, which is not one of our target countries today. We should be giving more, but it should have a specific target, the role that women could play in this process.

Could you talk about that aspect, perhaps using the role they have played in Colombia as a model?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: That is very interesting. A peace accord was signed 20 years ago in Guatemala and one is just about to be signed in Colombia. In any case, we are crossing our fingers and hoping that it will be signed.

If we look at the resolutions that have been adopted in multilateral discussions, the well-known resolutions on women, peace and security, that is, we see that these multilateral discussions are based on experiences in different peace processes, like those in Guatemala and Colombia. It is absolutely certain that particular attention was given to women's participation in the peace process in Colombia. There is a committee to address the issue.

Our team at the embassy jointly chairs a human rights committee and a committee on the equality of men and women. The group is extremely active. It brings together donors too.

As for women's participation in a peace process, we are much more frequently in a dialogue with the governments in the countries in which we are involved. That is what makes the difference. Subsequently, funding can be provided to support women's participation. However, things have to be put in motion first. That lesson was learned from the experiences that are codified in the United Nations resolutions on women, peace and security.

Do you want to add anything else, Ms. Paradis?

Ms. Mylène Paradis: I would like to mention one thing about this. If you look at Guatemala, you may say that it is not a priority country because it receives less development aid. Guatemala is, I believe, one of the only countries that receives aid, in addition to development aid, from our two other justice and security programs. These are the stabilization and reconstruction task force and the anti-crime capacity building program. Very few countries receive assistance from the department's various programs.

There is also the multilateral component. Guatemala receives a lot of money from multilateral partnerships. I think we have to look at all of Canada's programs in the country.

I feel that the focus is more and more on the participation of women. This is becoming a real priority for our entire department, both for Minister Bibeau and for Minister Dion. All the talk is about the importance of reaching women and girls. I think that resonates a great deal in countries like Guatemala and Colombia. We are doing it already, but my instinct tells me that we will be doing even more of it in the future.

Mr. Marc Miller: I would like to clarify what I said.

Our analysis on poverty shows that women are disproportionately affected by this. Given the rate of around 60% in Guatemala, women are either at the front when it comes to leadership, or suffering the consequences of it. I think it's obvious.

I believe I still have a minute or two. You can address this aspect, or I can let another committee member take the floor.

Ms. Paradis, do you have anything to say about that?

● (1615)

Ms. Mylène Paradis: No, that's fine.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: To expand a little on what Ms. Paradis said, if I understand correctly, Minister Bibeau appeared before the committee or had discussions with you. Clearly, the review that was started recently puts women and children at the heart of the consultation. We are reviewing our approach, ultimately.

Canada has always been recognized for paying particular attention to women's issues. As Ms. Paradis said, we can hope or believe that, fundamentally, we are on a positive path with this.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Genuis, go ahead, please.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Thank you very much.

Thank you to the witnesses.

I have a few questions on different parts of this. As we prepare to do our report on the women, peace, and security study, one of the questions we're going to have to answer is about looking at possibly supporting larger multilateral actors and then also responding to what we heard from witnesses about the need for core funding for small local on-the-ground organizations that are doing important work.

It's not that it's impossible to do both, but obviously, there has to be some determination of, let's say, the mix of support. I'm curious to hear your thoughts in the context of the countries we've talked about and your experience there. How do we weigh these different ways of being involved in the women, peace, and security agenda providing support to the major multilateral actors versus trying to identify local organizations on the ground? Also, in terms of the local organizations, there's the question of core funding versus project-based funding.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: May I ask for a clarification? When you say core funding to organizations, do you mean NGOs or multilateral organizations?

Mr. Garnett Genuis: In that second part, I was thinking that we heard there are many small organizations on the ground that are doing important work, but they may not have the size or scale to access major project-based funding and what they really need is just funding to keep the doors open. I'm thinking specifically at the level of local organizations, core versus project.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Okay, thank you very much for the clarification.

When I appeared last time, I did mention that depending on the category of country in which we are involved, the mix of tools we're using is slightly different. Of course in a country like Colombia, which is a middle-income country, whereas a country like Guatemala is poorer, you actually have to reach a balance, and that balance may differ from one country to the next. It is very much on a case-by-case basis.

For initiatives specific to the peace process, once a peace agreement is signed, we can expect to be using the United Nations quite a lot, certainly at the very beginning because they actually have a very strong network across the country, a network that we don't have. Of course, for security reasons, a number of organizations couldn't actually establish themselves. This being said, over time, we will be in a position to support organizations that will then be able to reach out.

In the case of Guatemala, we do work with a number of multilateral organizations. I'm thinking of UNFPA. On maternal and child health, we've done quite a lot over the last couple of years and we've also worked through the multilateral sector. It's very much a mix. If you look at the maps I've provided you, you will actually see the bilateral program. What we call global issues and development are with the multilateral organizations, and then partnerships for development and innovation are mostly initiatives with Canadian organizations, NGOs.

In both cases, we do have a mixture of tools to address the issue, be they related to a peace process or to meeting the needs of the population. You need to have various kinds of tools.

As for core funding to small organizations, usually local organizations if you're talking about local NGOs, we do have Canadian funds for small local initiatives and we do have small programs to support these organizations, but then it is very much a matter of reaching a balance between accountability and supporting those organizations. In some instances, we do have to do our due diligence. It's about reaching that balance.

● (1620)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: This is a conundrum we've reflected on before, so I appreciate that.

I'm getting a sense that you just have to look at which tools work best in the given situation in terms of who has the capacity.

I want to jump to something different. On the issue of the countries-of-focus study, we've had different perspectives presented before the committee about the concept of focus. Some people think it's a myth that we should be focused on specific countries, that we should just be open to wherever. Others see the value of having these long-term relationships and focus in terms of our expertise.

In terms of the experience in these two countries, what does that tell us more broadly about the concept of focus? Do you think these countries have benefited in a particular way from having the kind of commitment and certainty and volume that comes with being identified either as a country of focus or as a partner country?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: I will have to be consistent with what I said the last time I appeared on a similar question. I am of the view that focusing is a very good thing. We do need to get ourselves involved in the long term. Countries need predictability from donor communities to be able to know what to do with the funds and the support they are getting, and the only way to achieve long-lasting results is to be in the country over a number of years. If I recall correctly, I did mention health. I did speak to a number of MNCH, maternal, newborn and child health, initiatives. You cannot accomplish something sustainable if you're not involved over the long term. Especially in the education sector and the health sector, investments are usually very important if you do want to accomplish something.

In the case of Guatemala, as Mylène mentioned, our support to CICIG dates back to 2007-08. It's true that with a long-term commitment you can actually see the results of your investment.

In Colombia, we have been involved in demining for quite a number of years. There's still a lot of work to do, and because of the situation in Colombia, we haven't been able to go as far as we'd like to. But now we are very well positioned, if a peace agreement is signed, to do very, very good work. A long-term commitment and presence do end up showing results.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Do I have any more time?

The Chair: No, you're done, Garnett.

I have a quick question of clarification. My understanding is that the Canada fund for local initiatives does not supply funding for core funding, and it says it specifically in your policy. We've been told by many witnesses that in fact this is becoming a serious issue. Has something changed, or are the witnesses I've heard from not correct in that endeavour? Your comments suggest that this program in fact does give core funding.

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: No. I'm sorry if I gave the impression that CFLI is giving core funding. It isn't. I was trying to address the issue of supporting local organizations. This is what I meant.

Sylvia, do you want to add something?

Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto: I would just reiterate that's it true, at the moment, the way the fund is rolled out, it's on an initiative basis.

One of the main objectives of the fund is also to help build capacity within these smaller NGOs. We do have program coordinators within our embassy, or sometimes working with our embassy, to help build that technical knowledge within the local NGO population, which will help them to then seek other funding from perhaps bigger donors to help the core funding issue. I think that's important. At the moment, it is initiative based in the way we roll it out.

● (1625)

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

Ms. Laverdière would like to ask a very short question, Mr. Sanai. Do you mind?

Hélène.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

My question will be very brief. When will we have the report on the assessment of human rights in Colombia as part of our free-trade agreement?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: That's a very brief question, and I imagine the answer will be, too.

Ms. Sylvia Cesaratto: You'll have it very soon. The document has been drafted and is ready. We expect it will be available in the next few weeks.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sanai, please.

Mr. Raj Saini (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Thank you very much for coming here today.

I have a question I want to ask for clarity. Perhaps you could help me understand this.

My friend Mr. Levitt mentioned that Guatemala had 5,000 murders. When we look at the northern triangle of countries, whether it be El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras, we know that part of the situation is the gang warfare that's happening between MS-13 and Barrio 18. All three countries are affected by the same problem, but our aid delivery is a bit different. Honduras is a country of development, but Guatemala is a partner in development. The borders are very porous; similar situations are affecting all three countries, and we're talking about regional stability. I know that in Guatemala the focus is on food security and human security. In Honduras there's a different focus.

I'm just wondering if we're misaligning our focus and not achieving it. Part of the issue I'm sure many NGOs have is aid delivery, because the situation is not safe. Would it be more prudent to focus on the regional stability, and not just one country? All three countries have the same situation. They're geographically very closely located. Would it not be more prudent for Canada to focus its efforts on the regional stability of that area to make sure we deliver the aid effectively?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: That's a very good question. We are totally cognizant of what you're describing. Our analysis over the past couple of years has led us to believe that we need to start changing our focus.

Yes, in Guatemala we were involved in food security. Especially on the bilateral front, we were focusing on food security and health and education, and in Honduras as well at some point. MNCH was very much front and centre. We have started to shift our focus, I'd say in the past year, actually. You did refer to the consultation our assistant deputy minister had in Guatemala. He also went to Honduras. Those questions were raised by the government and by some of the interlocutors he met with. Clearly, we've indicated that we're totally open to start shifting our focus to address those issues of insecurity and try to address the root causes of the problem.

Mr. Raj Saini: Okay.

You brought up the issue of insecurity. Guatemala signed a peace accord 20 years ago, and now Colombia is on the cusp. Post-conflict, do we have any mechanism for providing a space for either mental health or women's health in those areas? Colombia especially has a different issue in that 40% of the FARC members were women. You have to reintegrate them into society and create a space for them. In Guatemala it's something else. Do we have a mechanism or a plan to address the same issue but in two different places?

Ms. Isabelle Bérard: Usually the humanitarian assistance that we have provided in Guatemala and the one that was just announced for Colombia will address issues related to the health of women. In the case of Colombia, it will deal with indigenous women as well.

Of course, through our normal health programming, we have been indirectly dealing with the mental health issues and issues of women victims. We did mention earlier the Canada fund for local initiatives. In the case of Guatemala, they did have specific initiatives to address mental health and to support the victims as well.

● (1630)

The Chair: I think we'll probably wrap it up there, colleagues, to try to stay on time today for a change. I have a bad habit on a Thursday, I understand, of making it longer than it's supposed to be.

On behalf of the committee I'd like to thank our witnesses from the department. We very much appreciate it. Just keep in mind that we're very seized with these initiatives, and we'll look forward to meeting with you many times again.

Thank you.

Colleagues, we'll take a quick break and then we'll come back to our witnesses in about five minutes.

● (1630)

(Pause)

● (1635)

The Chair: We'll bring this committee meeting back to order.

In our second hour, we're going to hear from Jean Daudelin, associate professor at the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University. From the Fio Corporation, we have with us Michael Greenberg, who is the chair. From Inter Pares, we have Bill Fairbairn, who we have talked to before. From KAIROS, which we have entertained before, we have Rachel Warden, who is the coordinator for Latin American partnerships and gender justice.

Welcome to all of you.

This is a little bit larger group, so I hope we can keep the opening remarks to about half an hour for the four. That gives us time to ask some very pertinent questions, so I would appreciate it if we could do our best in that regard.

Jean Daudelin is first on the list, so I will turn the floor over to him.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Daudelin (Associate Professor, The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to thank the committee for this invitation.

First, I'd like to apologize to the francophone members of the committee because my presentation will be in English since my notes and databases are in English. I'm sorry, of course, but I will be pleased to answer your questions in the language of your choice.

[*English*]

The two countries we're discussing today offer radically distinct situations, but also, in both cases, good reasons for selective Canadian engagement.

I'll start with Guatemala, one of the continent's poorest countries. Given the extreme inequality there, the average statistics hide the severity of the deprivation in which a large part of the population lives. It's also the country of the Americas with the largest proportion of indigenous people, the vast majority of whom are among the poorest of Guatemala's poor. If only for those reasons, Guatemala should be a shoo-in as a focus country for Canada's aid program. At the same time, however, the country is plagued by extreme levels of violence, corruption, a formally democratic but in practice extremely exclusionary political system, ineffective public institutions, and willingly underfunded public policies. The former president and vice-president were arrested, at the end of 2015, for literally selling government contracts. New arrests have taken place in recent days.

In a recent report—I think this is very important—the International Monetary Fund, a temple of fiscal orthodoxy, criticized the Guatemalan government for its lack of spending on infrastructure, education, and social services, and for keeping excessively low tax rates that prevent it from acting in those areas. Given the needs and the relatively stable economic situation of the country, the fund encouraged authorities to increase the fiscal deficit. I've been doing Latin American affairs for about 30 years. This was the first time I read a report of the IMF telling people that they could have a larger deficit. This gives you the scale of what I call the “willingly” restricted public policy expenditure in Guatemala.

The military is still unwilling to acknowledge the massive abuse of human rights it committed in the 1980s, which have been called, with reason, genocidal not only by human rights organizations but also by the Supreme Court of Guatemala. The party of the current president, Jimmy Morales, was set up by a group of retired military. Some of his closest advisers were involved in the campaign against the Ixil Mayans, which was basically the centre of the most savage part of the military campaign against the population. About 70% to 90% of the villages in that area were razed by the military during that campaign.

Corruption is rife among the military and the police, some of whose members are involved with major Mexican cartels in the transit of drugs from Colombia to Mexico to the United States. The management of the traffic, however, is poorly organized, contributing to a high homicide rate—less high than in the past, and less high than among some of its neighbours, but at 32 per 100,000, about 30 times higher than Canada's rate. Even if the Guatemalan military and police were functional and free of corruption, the economic power of Mexican organized crime would dwarf the capacity of local law enforcement to counter it. In other words, because of its political stability, Guatemala is not generally considered to be a fragile state, but it should certainly be seen as vulnerable to the ripple effects of Mexico's drug wars.

There are two bright spots in the bleak picture. The first one is the International Commission against Impunity in Guatemala. I think the representatives of the ministry explained what it was. I won't expand more. It's currently financed until September 2017. President Morales has asked for a renewal, and I think it's a good idea to support it. The other bright spot is the Attorney General's office under Thelma Aldana, which, with the support of CICIG but also on its own, has mustered remarkable courage to confront the network of politicians, military, and oligarchs that continues to dominate the local political system.

The rationales for Canadian aid include the dire needs in a country that could easily be destabilized by drug violence, but is tempered by its limited political absorption capacities. Mid-term potential for progress lies essentially in the consolidation of the rule of law where needs are important, credible recipients exist, and the potential for impact is significant.

● (1640)

I would thus recommend a very selective engagement, support for CICIG, and perhaps direct support for the attorney general's office. For the rest, I would say bypass the government and work with NGOs.

Colombia is a middle-income country with a stable democracy, quite effective institutions, and a bold, capable, and creative political class and technocratic elites. It has one of the largest economies in South America. It is second in population, and is still largely unexplored and unexploited in terms of natural, mineral, and agriculture wealth. It has enjoyed decades of stable and disciplined economic policy, no debt crisis, no large fiscal deficit, no hyperinflation. Its long-term prospects are good.

For these reasons, although it remains unequal and is only slowly addressing a large deficit in the provision of public goods to its poor population, it should be the very opposite of a shoo-in for Canadian development assistance. In theory, it should not be a country of focus. I will still make a case for it, though.

Colombia is currently at a crucial moment of its history as a protracted peace process is coming to fruition. It could spell the end of a series of civil wars that have shaken the country since basically the end of the 1940s almost without interruption. There's massive but not unanimous political support for the peace process, from left to right, including by the Uribisto sectors of the former government, and not only for the peace process but also for the government to invest resources in compensation of victims of the conflict, for repossession of land by people who were expelled from it, as well as for ambitious programs of land redistribution. We're talking millions. However, the promises made by the government, particularly with regard to repatriation, are fiendishly difficult to implement and also extremely expensive, probably well beyond the capabilities of the Colombian government at this point.

In addition, Colombia is still confronting extremely high levels of violence, much of it drug-related. Its homicide rate is still 50% higher than Mexico's, although Colombia is presented as some kind of success story in the fight against violence and drug trafficking. The production of cocaine has diminished in Colombia, but just recently eight tonnes of pure cocaine powder was confiscated. Eight tonnes, if sold pure on the Canadian market, would be worth about $800 million. It's still significant in the economy, and it's still a lot of money.

Rationale for Canadian aid: Co-operation with Colombia should be framed as a building block for long-term co-operation with a like-minded country with significant capabilities and a fast-rising regional status. The best way to see it is to think of what Chile has become since the FTA in 1997, only in this case Colombia is a country with much more significant demographic, economic, and military capabilities and potential. Chile is a small country with a small economy; Colombia is a big player.

Colombia is not dependent on foreign aid. The extent of the leverage that can be expected from the kind of money that Canada can offer will be limited, so the value of that aid matters less than the political commitment that it would represent. The recommendation is for selective engagement, mostly financial, mostly in support of the peace progress, perhaps very focused. Gender issues were mentioned. That would be an excellent area in which to focus resources.

There could be technical co-operation in areas of complementarity, such as public and tax administration; taxes could go up there too. In resource and land management, there is a massive challenge in Colombia related to the peace process. Finally, there should be triangular co-operation on drug policy and security, working with Colombia in third countries where and when political conditions are favourable, in Central America's northern triangle as a key target for instance, but not now.

● (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to the Fio Corporation and Mr. Greenberg, please.

Mr. Michael Greenberg (Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Fio Corporation): Thank you very much for inviting me.

Last year $8 trillion was spent for health care globally, with $2 trillion to lower- and middle-income countries. As well, $30 billion, a massive number that sounds small only when you compare it with these huge numbers, was spent on global health by the aid community, including USAID, UKaid, us, the Gates Foundation, and the Global Fund. About two billion contact points between people and a health care system occurred last year, meaning contacts between a patient and a doctor, a nurse, or a health worker.

At the heart of this massively expensive and complex system touching so many lives is a damaging dysfunction that I want to tell you about and that I think Canada can address as a theme. For people spending all of that money and managing all of those health care systems, there is next to no data going to them about how that money was actually spent and the kind of care that was actually delivered.

You hear that and you wonder how that can be. There are electronic health record systems, and health care IT systems, so how can there be no data? But when you're thinking about that, you're really thinking about hospitals and major medical centres. Those are the guys with that technology. But only about 5% of all of the two billion health care interactions I just mentioned occur in hospitals, while 95% occur in decentralized health care facilities—clinics, offices, and little health posts. Even in the U.S. it's no more than 15%. The vast majority of health care is delivered in decentralized facilities and the vast amount of money is spent there. Yet only approximately 5% of the data we have about health care comes from there, and 95% of all health care data we have over the last decade comes from about the 5% of where our health care happens.

It's not possible for any system organized like that to be spending the money wisely. There's a big data disconnect between where the vast majority of health care is delivered and the vast amount of money being spent. How can that be? Why isn't there more data coming out of clinics?

To understand the answer to that, just picture a clinic. You will picture, probably, hundreds of patients waiting to see a couple of health workers whose supervisors, by definition, are somewhere else, because that's the definition of decentralized health care. Now let's picture the health worker seeing patient number 22. In that short conversation, a tremendous amount of valuable information occurs about how the whole system works and the demographic needs of the population. At the end of that session, when patient 22 leaves, there's a data dilemma. This busy health worker can either stop and record all of what just happened with patient 22, or she—it's mostly a she—can go on to see patient 23. They go on to see patient 23 because there's no time to capture the data. In that moment, multiplied by several hundred times a day in that clinic and in millions of clinics, all of that golden, valuable information is gone.

If the health worker doesn't capture the data at the moment of care, no one gets the data—not their supervisors, not their funders, and not the World Health Organization. The result is a mind-boggling situation where you have trillions of dollars being spent and we don't know exactly how, and you have millions of health workers being very busy but we don't actually know what they're doing.

Fio Corporation is a Canadian company that has solved this problem and is scaling this solution globally. It's a solution that I'll describe briefly and then get back to the main problem. It's simple, it's sustainable, and it's scalable. Instead of the arrangement where delivering health care competes with capturing data, there's a technological way of having the delivery of health care drive, in an automatic way, large-scale data capture so that the result is unprecedented amounts of data for people responsible for the health care system and their funders and other stakeholders.

● (1650)

I have a visual aid here. This is a rapid diagnostic test. We don't make these things. Last year 800 million of these were sold, and that's growing at 20% a year. You squeeze a little blood out of a finger, put a couple of drops there, put in a little buffer, and then in some time, if this thing changes colour, it means you have tested positive for the Zika virus. That little test on the spot can tell you if you have Zika.

This is for malaria. It's the same thing for HIV, dengue, and so on. There are hundreds of millions of these a year. Health workers do this. Do they do this accurately? Nobody really knows. We've created a set of mobile smart devices that go into the hands of health workers. This is an example. It has a little drawer. After you prepare the test, you pop it in and it will read this test with a level of accuracy equal to that of a centralized laboratory. It's highly accurate.

It will guide the health worker. How do they even know which test to give? Well, there's a whole bunch of Q&A involved, and it will guide the health worker through that, and by offering questions and having answers that the health worker just touches as soon as the patient speaks, basically, as the health worker is delivering care, it is automatically entered as a by-product of that process. It is uploaded to a cloud from which managers overseeing these supervisors can be looking at their tablets or smartphones, and it is as if they are hovering over all of the thousands of clinics they're responsible for and they can actually see what's going on. It's a new level of accountability and transparency. It interconnects a continuum of care.

Cellphones became smartphones when they fused data and email with calls. These devices are fusing data with diagnostics and other care delivery. It's the same thing, and once they're together they won't be pulled apart.

The results from the field are a ten-fold reduction in diagnostic errors made by health workers within weeks. There's been a ten-fold increase in the accuracy of the care they give. Just because somebody gets the right diagnosis doesn't mean you get the right drug necessarily.

There has been a twenty-fold reduction in unnecessary patient visits. If you misdiagnose a patient and they're still sick, they're smart, and they're going to come back. If you give them the right diagnosis, the right treatment, they have better things to do than to come back.

There's been a twenty-fold increase in epidemiologic accuracy. For example, in a certain region of Kenya, they believed that malaria incidence was 17%. Think of all the drugs and tests the government must order for 17%. They installed our devices and found it was 0.7%. All those people with fevers didn't have malaria.

Africa spends approximately $1 billion per year on anti-malarial drugs for people who do not have malaria.

We're scaling this technology in a number of countries, and I guess this begins to get at the question that was posed. We're in Colombia. We're in Brazil, where we're working on the Zika problem. We're talking with Honduras and Ecuador. In west Africa we're in Ghana. We just entered Nigeria, where ExxonMobil—and this is a very interesting opportunity in which dollars are matched by the private sector—is doing a pilot in the Niger Delta.

In east Africa we're in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, and Ethiopia. In central Africa we just launched in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where people who are literally in the middle of nowhere to the rest of us are getting laboratory-quality care delivered with clinical expertise through these devices. We are in South Africa and Lesotho, and we are about to start a pilot in India with the largest private health care provider.

● (1655)

We are working in Europe with the largest diagnostic company, and the same in the United States. In the United States, the U.S. Department of Defense has us in about a half-dozen projects. We also work with the Gates Foundation and the Global Fund. We're in programs that deal with malaria, HIV, maternal and child health, and primary care. I tell you this list because we started relatively recently, and yet we have had such a response with this business of health care data from decentralized places and not hospitals that we're on to something.

You're contemplating a strategy of selected countries versus themes. When Fio came into being and started from scratch on this in 2010, we were in a world that had, to use a well-known phrase, “separate solitudes”. There was data and there was care delivery. You had to choose. It was data versus care. Our solution is based on realizing that there's a way to make it data and care—the fusion of care and data. Global health care data is a theme that can result in profound leverage when it's added to selected countries, because it's a sector that impacts all other sectors.

We always fly the Canadian flag whenever we do business anywhere. Canadians are known for being a measured people. Let's be known for measuring health care data. It's a wide open field. It's estimated that in the next five years there will be fifty times more health care data than today. It's a field in which tens or hundreds of millions of dollars of spending can impact hundreds of billions of dollars, or trillions of dollars, of other spending and outcomes. It's a very big bang for a very little buck when it's combined with selected countries.

Thank you very much.

● (1700)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Greenberg.

I'll go to Mr. Fairbairn.

Mr. Bill Fairbairn (Latin America Program Manager, Inter Pares): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee. It's really good to see you again today.

Thank you for the invitation to come and make a presentation. I've been asked to give some input about your upcoming trip to Latin America, as well as to provide some insights and recommendations on the study you're conducting. I'll do my best to do this in the time that I have.

Let me say at the outset we are delighted that you're going to Colombia and Guatemala this summer to learn first-hand about the very real challenges facing both countries and the aspirations of their citizens for a better future.

Inter Pares has worked with counterparts in both countries since the 1980s and we would be more than pleased to provide you with a detailed briefing and to facilitate meetings with local civil society contacts in each country. There are a lot of positive things to say about what's happening in both Guatemala and Colombia right now. Mr. Daudelin mentioned a number of them.

In Guatemala, as I mentioned to you in April, there have been important advances in the struggle against impunity this year. I'm referring especially to the Sepur Zarco case in which a group of Maya Q'eqchi' women made history this February in the first criminal trial for sexual violence during Guatemala's armed conflict and the first ever case of sexual slavery to be heard in a national court.

In Colombia, for the very first time in many years, there is real hope that peace accords will soon be signed to bring an end to the country's 60-year-old armed conflict. However, in both countries, conflicts are still raging. In Guatemala, we are seeing a re-militarization of citizen security, including declarations of states of emergency; judicial persecution of community leaders; and, once again, the establishment of military bases on territories of indigenous communities where there are existing land disputes. This is happening to support large-scale resource development projects, in particular, mining and hydro-electric dams.

Femicide remains a leading cause of death for women in Guatemala. In Colombia, as I speak, there are over 70,000 people —mainly indigenous, Afro-Colombian, and campesinos—who are taking part in mass mobilizations in 80 communities across the country, expressing their opposition to the Colombian government's development model, in particular its impact on marginalized communities and their access to land and food security.

Inter Pares has received disturbing reports of indiscriminate and excessive force being used by the state security forces against protesters. Last night in a phone call, I was told that to date three indigenous protestors have been killed, over 100 have been wounded, and close to 200 have been arrested.

As Colombia moves closer to a peace accord, there has also been an alarming increase in attacks against human rights defenders and members of political opposition parties, most notably the Marcha Patriótica.

For our partners in Guatemala and Colombia, your visit is extremely important and timely, and it goes without saying that we hope you will make adequate time in your agenda to have meaningful engagement with a broad range of civil society representatives in both countries. Doing so will enable you to hear directly and from the ground up the issues of concern and to learn first-hand about the impact of Canada's actions in the region, both positive and negative, in promoting human rights and democratic development.

Related to this, and before I speak to the theme of the committee's study, I'd like to bring an urgent matter to your attention. Two weeks ago, the president of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights issued a clarion call to the member states of the Organization of American States, stating that the commission is facing the worst financial crisis in its history and that unless member states come through with funding commitments by June 15—six days from today—the commission will be forced to lay off almost half of its staff, cancel its next two sessions, and suspend upcoming country visits.

The Inter-American Commission is the pre-eminent human rights body in the Americas, and Canada has been one of its strongest supporters, but unfortunately that commitment seems to have collapsed. Between 2011 and 2015, our financial support dropped from $600,000 to $75,000, and nothing has been committed for 2016.

Last week, the Americas Policy Group—a coalition of which Inter Pares is a member—sent an urgent letter to Minister Dion, calling on the Canadian government to show leadership in providing support this year and ensuring stable funding in future years, to ensure that the commission can undertake its important work. More than 300 prominent civil society organizations in 18 countries in the Americas have likewise signed an SOS in defence of the commission. We call on all members of this committee to urgently take up this issue, as we cannot afford to lose this important regional mechanism.

● (1705)

Turning to the issue of focus countries, this is an important theme with huge implications for organizations in our sector given the high concentration of Canada's aid budget in a small number of countries and sectors. At Inter Pares, we have never based our programming on lists of focus countries or sectors developed in Ottawa. Rather, our program is developed based on long-standing relationships with civil society counterparts in Canada and in the global south. For us, the most effective accompaniment we can provide is to support our partners' solutions and not impose our own.

We concur with the analysis and recommendations of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation, and would like to highlight six recommendations of our own.

The first recommendation is that if Canada maintains an approach based on focus countries, then there must be transparency in the selection of criteria, and these should be based on reducing poverty and inequality. We all know that situations can change overnight. Countries that seemed stable can suddenly become fragile states, or levels of inequality or poverty can grow very rapidly. We need to be flexible and responsive to meet the changing but real needs and realities on the ground.

Second, there should be a greater percentage of funding available for non-focus countries.

Third, the funding landscape has changed over the last years, as has the relationship between Canadian NGOs and the successors of CIDA. Increasingly, aid is “project-ized”, and NGOs are treated as service providers or contractors and not as long-standing partners in development. Our third recommendation is that it's crucial that the Canadian government reinstate its ability to provide long-term, predictable, and flexible core funding that allows Canadian civil society to build relationships with local civil society and respond to the opportunities, challenges, and needs as they arise. Our experience is that this long-term approach has provided the stability that is necessary to develop innovative and even groundbreaking programming. At times it involves taking risks.

I spoke to you earlier about the Sepur Zarco case in which our partners provided holistic accompaniment to the women plaintiffs for over a decade. To give you another example, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Inter Pares developed programming in Colombia that focused on the situation of internally displaced persons, or IDPs. In those years, the Colombian government was denying the existence of IDPs, claiming instead it was just a case of normal migration patterns. The Europeans were reluctant to support this work for a variety of reasons. In fact, while the term “refugee” has an authoritative definition under the 1951 refugee convention, there was no legal definition of “internally displaced persons”.

The support we received from the partnership branch of CIDA enabled us to engage on this theme in an agile way and gain valuable experience, which helped inform Canadian government policy. Not only did this help place the situation of IDPs on the map domestically, but it also contributed significantly to the development of the UN guiding principles on internal displacement, which today is the key international framework for work with internally displaced persons throughout the world.

Fourth, too often in conflict or post-conflict scenarios aid becomes entirely focused on strengthening the state. Supporting democratic states is very important, but it must include a balanced approach: ensuring a state is responsible to its people and empowering all people to hold their governments to account. Our recommendation four is that Canada needs to invest in local civil society, especially a civil society grounded in work with indigenous, oppressed, or excluded communities and populations.

My fifth point is around the promotion of women's rights. We have seen a shift in the past years away from supporting the broad range of women's rights, and instead focusing narrowly on supporting women as mothers. There has been a further narrowing of support excluding women's sexual and reproductive rights. Canada has been a leader in the promotion of women's rights globally, although we have lost ground in that area in recent years.

● (1710)

The news that Canada has been elected to the governing body of the UN Commission on the Status of Women is a welcome development, but it also means that with such a high profile role, we have more responsibility to ensure that we're walking the talk. Development with a feminist lens needs to mean something, and is a beautiful opportunity for global leadership.

Accordingly, our fifth recommendation—and it is in a package of them here—is that 20% of all Canadian aid investment should have the promotion of women's rights, advancing gender equality, and women's autonomy and empowerment as their principal focus. Moreover, women affected by armed conflict and post-conflict situations need to have access to the full range of sexual and reproductive health services without discrimination, including regarding pregnancies resulting from rape. Furthermore, thinking particularly of the situation in Colombia, it's crucial that we support women's active role in formal peace processes and in the monitoring the implementation of accords reached.

Sixth, and finally, we need to ensure policy coherence in our international development. Trade and commercial interests cannot trump human rights and undermine our development goals. Canada needs a human rights framework for its international assistance, including not only cooperation but also foreign policy and trade. We think that Canada should show strong coherence on the primacy of human rights in order to attain positive results.

Thank you very much for your attention. I look forward to your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Fairbairn.

Now we'll go to Rachel Warden who is representing KAIROS.

Rachel.

Mrs. Rachel Warden (Coordinator, Latin American Partnerships and Gender Justice Program, KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives): KAIROS very much appreciates this opportunity to appear as a witness. KAIROS and its member churches have a long history of working with partners in Colombia and Guatemala on issues of women's peace and security, indigenous rights, and ecological justice. You can imagine how difficult it's going to be for me to contain my remarks within eight minutes, but I'll do my best, and I hope this is the beginning of an ongoing dialogue.

We're encouraged by the committee's decision to host this consultation and by its plans to travel to Colombia and Guatemala at the end of the summer.

We look forward to continuing to work with you as you plan your delegation.

In April, my colleague Ian Thomson spoke to you about KAIROS' work, including our Women of Courage program. At that time he put forward some recommendations on women, peace, and security. In fact, our partners in Colombia are an integral part of our women, peace and security program. I hope to build on KAIROS' previous submission by speaking specifically about our partnerships in Guatemala and Colombia and what recommendations we can draw from this experience.

As Latin American partnerships coordinator and gender justice program coordinator at KAIROS, I've had the privilege of working with civil society organizations in Colombia, particularly women's organizations, over the last 15 years.

Today I want to focus on one partner, La Organización Femenina Popular, the popular feminist organization, which is a grassroots women's organization that has worked for 44 years in the region of Magdalena Medio. I do this because the OFP represents the tenacity, the creativity, the resilience, and the determination of many civil society groups in Colombia, characteristics that have allowed it not only to survive, but to thrive despite the conflict and the constant threats to its work and to the lives of its members.

OFP works at a local level through women's centres, providing training, legal accompaniment, and even affordable food at community kitchens. At the same time, it plays a key role in networks for peace and human rights at a national level. While its strategies and programs have changed in response to the context of the conflict, it remains a reference point for work in human rights and peace. For example, in the 1990s at the height of paramilitary control in Barrancabermeja, when it was extremely dangerous—deadly, in fact—to be a human rights defender, the OFP led and held together a human rights network at a local level, while simultaneously mobilizing tens of thousands of women in the most conflict-ridden areas in Colombia and providing accompaniment to these women in these conflict areas.

In 2012 the OFP held regional women's courts for justice, peace, and territory and gathered hundreds of testimonies from women who had experienced human rights violations as a result of the conflict. In the context of impunity, these ethical or symbolic courts were an important space for women to denounce human rights violations and to expose the truth. Legal action demanding reparation was initiated in a number of the cases presented during these women's courts.

The visibility of the crimes also strengthened the advocacy efforts of the women's movement, as well as its demands for truth, justice, and reparation within the current peace process. In the last few years, the OFP has engaged in a process to secure collective reparations from the Colombian state under law 1448 on the rights of victims to reparation.

The OFP's 44 years of work with victims and survivors, as well as its crippling institutional losses, including the assassination of a number of its leaders, makes this case for collective reparations emblematic in Colombia. It has documented this experience in a number of documents and those are being used as a model. As well, throughout the reparation program, the OFP has made concrete advances and real change in the lives of thousands of women.

In the OFP we see the resilience of civil society in Colombia, its ability to respond to the given national and local context to create spaces and proposals for peace, and to reach the most vulnerable populations with really concrete programs. In fact, at KAIROS, our gender-justice work has been inspired by the OFP. We have learned how militarized conflict impacts women; how women are victimized many times over through gender, inequality, poverty, and racism; and how sexual violence is used in the strategy of war. At same time, we have seen how women's groups are integral actors in defence of human rights and processes for peace, justice, and reparations.

● (1715)

The OFP has also demonstrated the importance of psychosocial and legal accompaniment that empowers women victims of human rights violations to heal and themselves become active in the peace process. This is in fact the basis of our women, peace, and security program that is currently under active review in the partnership branch at Global Affairs. The focus of this program very much aligns with the focus of this committee's work. Civil society organizations like the OFP represent Colombia's hope and strength and require ongoing and sustained support.

This brings me to two recommendations. One is that Canada's bilateral assistance must prioritize financial support for independent civil society groups in Colombia, particularly women's groups. It is important that these are long-term partnerships and that they inform development policy and priorities. Investing in civil society will guarantee resources to groups that have the capacity to influence and implement peace accords on the ground. Two, it is important that bilateral assistance adopt a human rights approach to development, including accompaniment of victims of human rights violations and providing human rights training. We have seen, as I mentioned, how women, often victims of violence themselves, can become protagonists in the peace process with appropriate psychosocial support and human rights training.

I would like to take the last few minutes to talk about our partnerships in Guatemala and how this experience informs additional recommendations for your review.

For 10 years now, KAIROS has worked with CEIBA, an organization that supports community development in indigenous communities in western Guatemala. CEIBA was founded in 1994 when Guatemalan refugees were returning to the region. It has accompanied these communities since then with responsive programming in community development and human rights. CEIBA has delivered programs in community health, food sovereignty, environmental and land protection, leadership development, and human rights training.

Some of the communities accompanied by CEIBA are responding to resource extraction projects, the majority of which involve Canadian companies. In a number of cases, communities have raised concern that these projects threaten the very community development and human rights that are being supported by this partnership, particularly indigenous rights. When they raise these concerns, when they protest and demand that their rights be respected, they face criminalization, threats, and sometimes death. In Guatemala, as in Colombia, we have seen an increase in threats and assassinations of indigenous and environmental rights defenders. Leaders in CEIBA, as well as in the communities they accompany, have been targeted.

Based on this experience and the conflict in Guatemala, I would like to add the following recommendations. Canadian development policy and practice must be informed by indigenous rights, including FPIC, free, prior, and informed consent, as outlined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, the Government of Canada must establish a mechanism to hold Canadian resource extraction companies accountable, so that the investment and resource extraction policy does not undermine the very development initiatives we are trying to support. To this end, we call on the Canadian government to establish an independent ombudsman on resource extraction and legislation that holds Canadian companies accountable.

To summarize then, Colombia and Guatemala must be a focus. More importantly than this, within this focus, Canadian development assistance must support independent civil society groups in long-term partnerships. By doing so, we are investing in resilient, effective programming that reaches the most vulnerable. Human rights are key. Development assistance needs to be underpinned by Canada's commitments to human rights, including the rights of indigenous people and to all women. Finally, Canadian development assistance needs to be responsive and informed by long-term partnerships with civil society organizations in Canada, in Colombia, and in Guatemala. Our partners tell us that as important as financial support is the capacity of the Canadian government to amplify their voices in their demands for peace and human rights.

Finally, and as I mentioned earlier, KAIROS has submitted an unsolicited proposal to the partnership branch at Global Affairs. While we are still awaiting a response, we remain hopeful that the work of KAIROS and our partners will complement and ensure the success of Canada's international development assistance in Colombia and in other countries of concern.

● (1720)

KAIROS very much appreciates being included in this consultation, and we look forward to being a part of the ongoing dialogue as you prepare your itinerary in Colombia and Guatemala, and in the policy discussions that follow.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much to all our presenters this afternoon.

In the short time that we have, we'll have protracted questions for a round, at least—or we'll give it a try.

We'll start with Mr. Allison.

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): My questions are along the lines of our countries of focus. We've had a number of individuals in here saying that maybe it should be thematic, and that maybe it could involve more countries or maybe fewer countries.

However, I want to talk specifically to you, Mr. Greenberg, about your experience in Colombia and the thought process that you have. Why Colombia? Tell us a bit about your experience and what you've been doing there.

Mr. Michael Greenberg: I learned so much listening to the other witnesses.

Our experience in Colombia was one of our first experiences in the field. It was a small program, about 70 clinics, called Proyecto Malaria Colombia where they were literally in the middle of nowhere and were trained up and integrated with the concept of integrating data and care. The program went very well, and in fact Proyecto Malaria Colombia's program was awarded the Malaria Champions of the Americas Award by the World Health Organization because of the transparency and accountability of that program.

I had a bunch of others. The one that comes to mind next is a current program that some of our folks, actually, have spoken with the chief of staff to President Santos about. President Santos has spoken, I think in Norway, on the dispersed populations program. Currently, I think there are 12 million or 13 million people who don't live in towns and cities, and who basically get very minimal, if any, health care at all. The idea is to arm minimally trained health workers with technology so that those 12 million or 13 million people can receive care. We've been working with that group for about a year now and awaiting the outcome, but should that work, it will be in multiple departments in Colombia across the country. I think it would be a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate how minimally trained health workers can, in an accountable way, deliver care to a lot of people who haven't received it. All of this is part of this post-FARC restoration program, which he's talked about.

● (1725)

Mr. Dean Allison: I have a second question. Some of the places you mentioned are countries of focus, some aren't, and maybe some are partner countries, etc. What are your your thoughts on health care and sustainability? I ask because we talk a lot about what happens in countries and that if they don't have proper health care, or whatever the case may be, it's tough in terms of employment, and some of these other things. The other witnesses mentioned a whole other series of issues that we have to deal with in terms of women's rights, etc. Do you have any thoughts on this idea of sustainability as it relates to countries in the long term and health care?

Mr. Michael Greenberg: I hope this is an answer to your question. A number of years ago *The Economist* had a cover that called Africa a basket case. It was as if to say that as bad as Africa was, it's now worse. That was because Africa had a double-digit percentage rates of HIV. You read that and just thought it was hopeless. More recently, *The Economist* had a cover, “Africa rising”, and cited the fact that six out of the ten top-growing economies of the past decade had been African countries.

What happened in-between was that an international development program called PEPFAR, funded by the U.S. government and led by a gentleman who was just here a few weeks ago, Mark Dybul, combatted AIDS on a continental level and installed a minimal infrastructure for health care. There are a very few other things you can point to that allowed this tremendous transformation. How did Africa suddenly go from a basket case to Africa rising? A massive contributor was actually investment, through PEPFAR, in health care. I think that's a big lesson. It's very important.

The other sustainability factor that comes to mind is that in sub-Saharan Africa about $75 billion a year is spent on cellphones—people talking and texting in a continent that people thought had no funds for that. But here's an industry that demonstrated a sustainable practice, which according to many presidents in Africa has contributed hugely, as much as international development has.

The answer, at least the one that leads us, is a focus on health care as it relates to other sectors, and on non-traditional business models for health care. Most notably—let's copy what's succeeded—we have the example of the cellphone, globally $600 billion a year in lower- and middle-income countries. That demonstrates there is a pathway to sustainability to health care.

The Chair: Now let's go to Mr. Sidhu, please, and we'll try to keep the questions and answers short.

Thank you.

Mr. Jati Sidhu (Mission—Matsqui—Fraser Canyon, Lib.): Mr. Greenberg, you touched on Fio's mobile diagnostic devices and cloud information service earning the top 2013 position in the malaria championship of America. Now, with Fio's past involvement in Colombia, I was wondering what their next steps will be to develop health care systems for Colombian women that have been victims of violence in the country.

Mr. Michael Greenberg: That's why we focused all of our resources on this dispersed population program, because that will be the first step to getting any kind of health care technology that's trackable. You actually know what happens to these people—women, children and men—who otherwise have no access at all.

Once a technology is touching the dispersed populations in recording, you are now in a position to add benefits to that. Right now there are basically no roads to those places, and I think this kind of mobile health technology, which wasn't possible a decade ago, opens up the roads, so to speak, to those populations you're talking about.

● (1730)

Mr. Jati Sidhu: In the rural areas—

Mr. Michael Greenberg: In the rural areas, but we're also deployed in the towns. Even in a lot of the towns there is very poor access. The way mobile health technologies in general work is that they're apps. We have an app for maternal and child health, an app for sexually transmitted infections, and apps for other areas of health care. In time, as other companies develop their apps, all of it can be downloaded via the cell network, which already exists there. So we're actually leveraging existing infrastructure in order, then, to reach these populations with new benefits—not just ours, but anybody's. We welcome hosting any apps on our system.

Mr. Jati Sidhu: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'll keep the time.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms. Laverdière, *s'il vous plaît*.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would first like to make a brief comment on the situation at the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. I, myself, wrote to Minister Dion last week about this. I encourage my Liberal colleagues, who may have the opportunity to speak with their colleagues now that they have heard the witnesses, to do the same. This institution is really important, one that Canada has traditionally supported, but this support has waned recently, particularly under a previous government.

I would like to thank all the witnesses for their presentations. Since we have only a little time left, I will ask you a quick question because I have to leave the meeting shortly.

Human rights activists are often attacked in Colombia. How can we protect human rights activists?

My question is for Mr. Fairbairn and Mrs. Warden in particular.

Mr. Bill Fairbairn: Thank you very much for the question.

[*English*]

In fact, I would like to show you something here. I've been travelling to Colombia since 1989 and I'd have to say that I've never met as courageous men and women as Colombians, and I'm thinking particularly of human rights defenders.

I was in contact with the Canadian Ambassador to Colombia last night, who is on a trip today to Villavicencio. I sent her an article that I wrote 20 years ago about the murder of a friend of mine who was the director of the human rights organization that she's visiting today.

In Colombia, because of the relentless attack against human rights defenders, the government has received funding to create a state apparatus to protect human rights defenders. There is a security check. The human rights defenders will be asked for their route, where do they go, what are their risks, and there will be an evaluation done. Based on that, they'll be provided with a bulletproof vest or an armoured car or bodyguards.

In fact, I've found myself many times in Colombia, when I'm in an office with someone, almost forgetting about the risks for a moment, because I was talking about their families, their kids, and how are things. But then we'd go down to the local restaurant and on our way out, I'd find my colleague reaching for a bulletproof vest to walk three blocks down the street. Suddenly it hits you where you are and the danger these people face day in and day out.

I have a little prop here, but this is something that Colombian human rights defenders have developed. As you see, it's a plastic imitation of a bulletproof vest and it says, women and men, human rights defenders in Colombia, we need a lot more than bulletproof vests to protect our lives. This is to show that the response of the Colombian state in providing armoured cars or bulletproof vests is not what is going to protect people. It's addressing the root causes, and dismantling the paramilitary groups that are behind a lot of the targeted assassinations of human rights defenders.

Right now almost one human rights defender is murdered every week in Colombia, and about two per week are threatened with some sort of attack, so it's extremely serious. I'm hoping that during your time in Colombia, you'll be able to take time to listen to human rights defenders and hear their proposals for how to change the situation.

● (1735)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Do you want to make a comment relating to that question?

Mrs. Rachel Warden: I would just add to that the importance of protecting indigenous rights defenders and women human rights defenders, who have been particularly targeted. The OFP has reported an increase in femicide in the area of Magdalena Medio, where they work.

It is important to support these local organizations, at the same time as supporting multilateral organizations like the OAS. There is a duality there and it's very important to support both of them.

The Chair: We'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos, now.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Professor Daudelin, you spoke about Colombia at length and made us aware of some of the key developments. I would like your thoughts on our policy as far as countries of focus go, with reference to a state like Colombia.

You talked about it as being relatively stable, with established democratic institutions. If we look at certain measures, the Human Development Index for example, Colombia ranks 97th. It has a per capita GDP of around $7,900. It's fair to call Colombia a middle-income state, so to speak, as problematic as these categories are. You also said that it's not reliant on foreign aid, or in other words, that it can live without foreign aid.

But I think there's still a case to be made for keeping Colombia on the countries-of-focus list and maintaining a relationship with it in that regard. Can you speak to that point? It goes to a larger point, though I don't wish to lead you in a certain direction, but there are those who say and suggest that Canada ought to maintain development assistance links with states in this kind of a position.

Mr. Jean Daudelin: I'll give you a brief response. It will focus on the importance of a long-term partnership and basically on imparting a degree of a long-time horizon to Canada's partners in the developing world, especially given the small size of our aid to a country like Colombia. I think my colleagues have pointed out how important it is for non-governmental organizations to have long-term partners, and I think it is the same thing for governments; basically, for the stability, for the credibility of Canada's aid program but also for the potential for that relationship to develop into something larger, which is what I pointed out when I mentioned triangular co-operation. That happens when Colombian organizations or Colombian officials become partners in Canada's activities in third countries in, for instance, the field of public security, the field of human rights, or the field of human-rights protection, with either local organizations or the government.

That's my quarrel with the idea of revising focus countries on a regular basis. When you drop countries or you drop partners, doing so cannot but register with your new partners, who will think, “Okay, I have five years, and if I'm good and if I succeed then they will drop me”. I don't think that's a good principle on which to build an aid program.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Just as a quick follow-up, you compared Colombia to Chile. Would you also say that because of Colombia's importance as a state and perhaps even as regional power, with economic and many other factors measured and taken into account, that as Colombia goes, so goes the region?

Mr. Jean Daudelin: I would not say that. I think Latin America is much less integrated than we like to think, but I think your point is very well taken. Colombia in fact is much more important than Chile. Canada's discovery of Colombia, as it were, which took place under the previous government in Canada—at least at the governmental level, because NGOs were already present—was a very positive development in our engagement with the region. But again, if it's just for the short term, we will lose credibility.

● (1740)

The Chair: Thank you very much, colleagues. I very much appreciate your time and your patience.

To all four of you, thank you. I know it's difficult when there are four very good witnesses and never enough time. I want to thank you very much. These were very good presentations. As you know, as a new committee starting off under a new government, we're trying to get our feet and our heads around what's going on in certain parts of the world where we think we have a legitimate role to play, and I think you've made a difference in giving us that kind of information. Thank you. I'm sure we'll see each other many times again.

Colleagues, see you next week.

The meeting is adjourned.